

The signs of the times : a sermon preached before the Right Honourable the Lord-Mayor, and court of aldermen, at the Cathedral of St. Paul, on Friday the 8th of December, 1721 being the day appointed for a general fast for the prevention of the plague / by Edmund Massey.

Contributors

Massey, Edmund, 1690-1765.

Publication/Creation

London : Printed, for J. Brotherton and W. Meadows ... and sold by T. Bickerton, 1722.

Persistent URL

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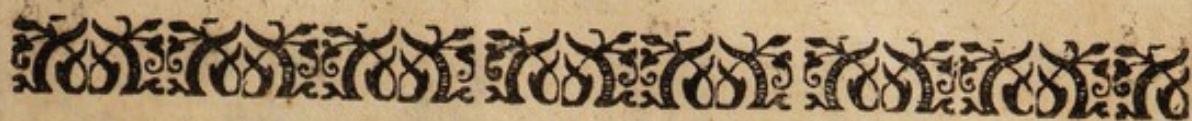
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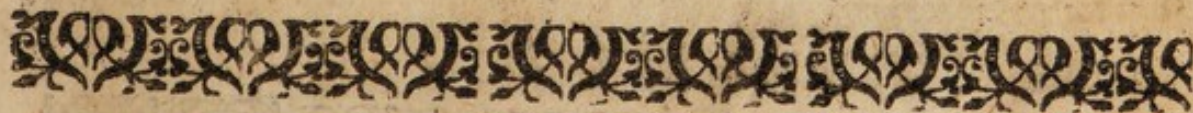
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Mr. MASSER's
SERMON

Before the
LORD-MAYOR, &c.

ON
Friday, December the 8th, 1721.



Stewart, Mayor.

Favis xiv^o die Decembris, 1721. Annoq; Regni Regis Georgii, Magnæ Britanniaë, &c. Octavo.

THIS Court doth desire the Reverend Mr. *Massey* to print his Sermon, preach'd at the Cathedral Church of Saint *Paul*, on *Friday* last, (being the Day appointed by His Majesty to be observed as a General Fast) before the Lord-Mayor, Aldermen, and Citizens of this City.

Stracey.

THE
SIGNS of the TIMES.

A
SERMON

Preached before the Right Honourable the

LORD-MAYOR,

And COURT of

ALDERMEN,

AT THE

Cathedral of St. PAUL,

ON

Friday the 8th of December, 1721.

BEING THE

Day appointed for a General FAST for the
PREVENTION of the PLAGUE.

By EDMUND MASSEY, M.A.
Lecturer of St. Alban Woodstreet.

The THIRD EDITION.

L O N D O N :

*Printed, for J. Brotherton and W. Meadows, at the
Black-Bull in Cornhill, and Sold by T. Bickerton in
Pater-Noster-Row. MDCCXXII. Price 6d.*

216 N. 3. of the Times.

STERRMON

LORD-MAYOR.

ALDERMEN

Cathedral of St. Paul.



ROBERT M. A. S. T. M. A.

The Times.

NO. 10. N. 10. N. 10.

Black & White.

Black & White.



JEREMIAH V. 29.

*Shall I not visit for these Things, saith
the Lord? Shall not my Soul be
avenged on such a Nation as this?*



UR Prophet is sent to exhort
the *Jews* to Repentance, by Mo-
tives the most persuasive of any
Thing in Nature, viz. Self-
Preservation, and securing their
Country from those terrible
Judgments which God was just
ready to send upon them for their Iniquities.

The National Character given of them in this
Chapter, is, That they made an ill Use of all Ver. 3.
God's Blessings, both Spiritual and Temporal;
that they *were incorrigible*; that they turned his — 7.
Grace into Wantonness: That their Luxury had
brought forth Atheism and Infidelity; that they
had introduced great Abuses in the Civil State, and — 25.
B were

Ver. 31. were pleased with the general Corruption of the Ecclesiastical.

It was now almost Forty Years that God, who is slow to Anger, had born their walking directly contrary to that Covenant which they had made with Him under King *Josiah*; and so long had *Jeremiah* preached Repentance to that devoted People, who all along despised his Counsel, set at naught his Reproofs, and neglected his Exhortations.

But although He had been almost *Forty Years* long grieved with this Generation, yet did He still graciously forbear to punish it, till He had tried all Expedients possible, to turn away His

Wrath from such deserving Objects. *Run ye to and fro*, says the Prophet, *thorough the Streets of Jerusalem, and see now and know, and seek in the broad Places thereof, if ye can find a Man, if there be any (single Person) that executeth Judgment, that seeketh the Truth, and I will pardon it, for his sake.* This solitary Hope being disappointed, he proceeds to find out something to say in their Vindication, and lays the Fault of their Wickedness upon the Deficiency of their Understanding, that they had no Capacity to receive Instruction, and pleads their Ignorance in Excuse of their Folly, as if it was invincible. Surely, says he,

- 4. *these are poor, they are foolish, for they know not the Way of the Lord, nor the Judgments of their God: I*
- 5. *will get me unto the great Men, and will speak unto them; for they have known the Way of the Lord, and the Judgment of their God; but these have altogether broken the Yoke, and burst the Bonds. Nothing now remains, but a certain fearful looking for of Judgment, because no Excuse nor Apology*
can

can be made for Sins of Presumption; and the Question of my Text, which is repeated in this Chapter, besides setting forth the Certainty of God's Visitation, seems to be an Appeal to the common Sense of Mankind; nay, even to the Delinquents themselves, Whether National Judgments are not due to National Crimes and Corruptions, which arise not for Want of Knowledge, but from the Abuse of it; not from Ignorance of God's Laws, but an open Defiance and Contempt of them? *Shall I not visit for these Things, saith the Lord? Shall not my Soul be avenged on such a Nation as this?*

The Subject of this Denunciation is indeed particular, but the Import of it is universal, applicable to any People or Nation upon Earth in such unhappy Circumstances, that is, of such depraved Morals; whose Sins, like the *Jews*, are not Sins of Ignorance, but against Knowledge, or under Means of Conviction.

You perceive the Use I must make of the Text, viz.

I. *Inquire first, What those Things are for which God Almighty will visit a People.*

II. *I shall attempt a Vindication of Divine Providence in such a Procedure. And,*

III. *In the last Place (remembering, That if we wou'd make this our Day of Humiliation a Day of Atonement, all Hypocrisy and Disimulation must be laid aside) I shall set before you what I apprehend to be the proper Business of a Fast, the Causes and Reasons of this our*

solemn Assembly, and our Apprehensions of God's just Visitation.

I. *I am to inquire what those Sins are for which Almighty God will visit a People.* And in so doing, I shall take the Information of this Chapter only, where *Visit* is used in the severe Sense of the Word, and lay it before you in the same Order as I find it.

Jer. 5. 2. The first mention'd is, *Swearing falsely*: *Though they say the Lord liveth, surely, says the Prophet, they swear falsely.* The first, and more obvious Interpretation of which Words, respects the general Practice of taking God's Name in vain in common and ordinary Conversation, or the more deliberate Acts of premeditated Perjury. The first of these is called *Swearing falsely*, because it is by no means required of us; and natural Religion has taught Men, that in Things trivial and indifferent, God is never to be called upon as an Arbitrator. If an Heathen could observe, That the Deity was not at Leisure for small Affairs, surely a Christian ought not to call God to Witness in Matters which are neither Weighty nor Important. Now, besides dishonouring that Name which is *Holy* and *Reverend*, and making that Majesty familiar, which shou'd keep us at an awful Distance, it so falls out, that we cannot thus dishonour God without the Loss of our own Reputation: For the Original of Oaths being founded upon the Treachery of Mankind, he who makes a Practice of Swearing publickly, proclaims as publickly, that he is hardly to be believed. Moreover, it cannot but happen, that he who sweareth commonly, must swear falsely, because the frequency of the Practice does manifestly

ly evidence his Disesteem of an Oath as a Thing sacred, and Forgetfulness of Him by whom he swears: Now, here is a sacred Institution profaned, and the Person appealed to, not thought upon, an Oath so circumstantiated must be a false one, because it is of the Essence of a true Oath to be used religiously, and that the Person taking it, consider himself as in the more immediate Presence of Almighty God.

Although this be bad enough, yet Acts of deliberate Perjury are still worse; for they make the God of Truth witness to a Lie, which of all Things He professeth most to abhor; the Reason is this, because of all Things it is most contrary to his Nature; the Devil being a Liar, and the John 8.44: Father of it.

Criminals of this Sort God has declared that He will not *hold Guiltless*, that is, according to the Original, He will not make Clean, alluding to the legal Purification by the Blood of the Sacrifices: If then, God will accept no Sacrifice nor Oblation for this Sin, if nothing can intervene to pacify an offended God, and divert the Course of his executive Justice, but Repentance for what is past, and a contrary Practice, we have all the Reason in the World to expect upon a Perseverance, that He will *visit for these Things*, and his Soul arise to be avenged on those who blaspheme, or take his Name in vain.

St. Jerome upon this Place, calls the *False Swearers* hypocritical Professors of Religion, who say the Lord liveth; that is, behave themselves outwardly with a seeming Regard to their Duty; have a *Form of Godliness* in Speech, but deny the 2 Tim. Power 3. 5.

Power of it in their Actions: This he gathers from the Connexion of this Verse with the preceding, Though they say the Lord liveth; which signifies, that they kept up the Shadow or Appearance of Judgment and Truth there mention'd, tho' in reality they were Strangers to the Substance. This dissembled Holiness may be called False Swearing, inasmuch as the Evidence of an Hypocrite's Actions, do directly invalidate the solemn one of his Words; and although he be never so frequent in the Temple, or punctual in the Duties of the Closet, so long as his Mouth and his Heart go not together, he sweareth falsely, by taking God's Name in vain in every Prayer he makes: He must be very young in Scripture who knoweth not the Portion of these Men; which, tho' generally respecting the Life after this, yet sometimes it so providentially falls out, that they meet their Punishment in this World, where only they receive their Reward. For thus saith the Lord, Forasmuch as this People draw near me with their Mouth, and with their Lips do honour me, but have removed their Heart far from me, and their Fear toward me is taught by the Precept of Men: Therefore behold I will proceed to do a marvellous Work among this People, even a marvellous Work and a Wonder: For the Wisdom of their wise Men shall perish, and the Understanding of their prudent Men shall be hid. Which Prophecy, whether it relate to any Captivity of the Jews, or foretels their present Blindness and Dispersion, is a dreadful Instance of God's angry Visitation for the Sin of Hypocrisy; and, as I before observed, those Examples in Holy Scripture that are particular as to their Subject, are universal in their Import.

Isa. 29.
13, 14.

It seems the *Jews* had smarted for these Sins before, and every Calamity that ever afflicted them was to be accounted for by some remarkable Defection from the received Law; and every Deliverance by hearty Sorrow for the Offence, and Promise of Amendment. But although, in the *Day of Adversity*, they made good Resolutions, they seldom made those Resolutions good. This makes the Prophet, in the

2d Place, complain of their *Incorrigibleness*; that they had made no Proficiency in the School of Affliction, nor turned their Misfortunes to the Advantages designed: *Thou hast stricken them*, Jer. 5. 3. says he, *but they have not grieved, thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive Correction: They have made their Faces harder than a Rock, they have refused to return. Shall I not visit, for these Things, saith the Lord? Shall not my Soul arise to be avenged on such a Nation as this?* Whence I draw this Conclusion, That when lesser Judgments do not procure Amendment, greater are to be expected. If we refuse to be corrected with *Rods*, God will chastize us with *Scorpions*.

The Divine Judgments are principally intended for the Reformation of that People upon whom they are sent. *When thy Judgments* Isa. 26. 9. *are in the Earth, says the Prophet, the Inhabitants of the World will learn Righteousness.* And so God deals with us as good Kings do with their Subjects, who punish the Rebellion of a Number by making necessary Examples of a few, and that not out of Hatred to the Persons who suffer, but Love to them whom they graciously forbear, and hopes of bringing them to a Sense and Performance of their Duty: But if this Design fails, if
gentler

gentler Methods are found to be ineffectual to the End proposed, and we resist the Power they have to move us, 'tis certainly an Invitation to more sharp Inflictions. For if it be the Purpose of God to reclaim by Severity, either that Purpose must fail, which it were Blasphemy to assert, or that Severity continue or increase by just Degrees, till what was at first intended be brought to pass. Thus in the Case of *Pharaoh*, the Gradation of his Punishment is observable, from inanimate Things to the Beasts of the Field, the Fruit of his Land was destroyed before the Fruit of his Body, and every new Plague added something to the Weight of the former. An obstinate Sinner, like a Man in a Lethargy, must be awakened, tho' by Violence, or else his Sleep will prove his Destruction.

This Doctrine the Prophet thought so plain and undeniable, that not to apprehend it, must proceed from a natural Defect in the Understanding, or from an Incapacity to cultivate and improve it.

- Jer. 5. 4. *Surely, says he, these are Poor, they are Foolish: I will get me to the great Men: Imagining by the Rule of Contraries to find other Affections stirring among those whom the Favour of God had happily distinguish'd, by the Advantages of a plentiful Fortune, and a liberal Education: But those he found, contrary to his Expectation, making a*
- 5. *bad Use of God's Blessings, breaking the Yoke of Obedience, and bursting all Bonds of Restraint, living upon Earth like the Leviathan in the Waters, as if it were made only for them to take their*
- Psal. 101. 26. *Pastime therein: Making their Will their Law, and turning their Liberty into Licentiousness. Shall I not visit for these Things, saith the Lord? Shall not my Soul be avenged on such a Nation as this? The*

Question upon this Particular, thrown into a Proposition, is this.

1st. That the Abuse of signal Mercies provokes God to plague us with signal Judgments. Various are the Ways by which Blessings may be abused; as *First*, When they are received without Acknowledgment, and paying that Tribute of Thanks which is justly due to the Giver of all good Gifts: When we take them as corrupt Persons do Bribes, with our Hands behind us, unwilling to own from whence they come; or, which is worse, if we look upon our Advantages as owing only to our selves, as the Acquisitions of our own Wit or Parts, or Industry only, and so *sacrifice to our own Nets*; that is, think our selves beholden to nobody for them; when Blessings are thus unthankfully received, and presumptuously enjoyed, the Punishment of Ingratitude, which as such never yet found a Patron, is justly our Portion; besides that which is due to a rebellious Incroachment on the Divine Prerogative, whose alone is the Disposal of the *Earth, and all that therein is.* Hab. 1. 6. 1
Psal. 24. 1.

For this Reason the *Jews* were more than once cautioned not to ascribe the Greatness of their future Power or Riches, to their own Procurement, independent of the Divine Assistance, which alone maketh *one Man to differ from another.* 1 Cor 4. 7. Whosoever is so inconsiderately, or presumptuously Unjust, robs God of His peculiar Property, and obliges Him not to suffer the sacrilegious Invader to escape with Impunity.

Again, the holy Psalmist says, *God hath made his Works to be remember'd.* Psal. 3. 4. If so, then,

2dly, *We abuse God's Mercies, when we suffer the Memory of them to perish, and forget what He has done for us.* It is a fresh Provocation to have little or no Sense of Benefits received. Such a one at least deserves to forfeit the Favours he has so slighted, or to be deserted upon his Want of a like Assistance. The common Sense and Practice of Mankind speaks this. And we know it was
 Psal. 106. imputed to *Israel* as Sin, That *they forgot God*
 21, 22, 23. *their Saviour, which had done great Things in Ægypt; wonderful Things in the Land of Ham, and fearful Things by the Red-Sea: Therefore He said He would destroy them.*

3dly, *Mercies are then most eminently abused, and God in the highest Degree provoked, when we make His Favours Incentives to Wickedness, and rebel against Him in the Strength of His own Benefits.* Thus our Prophet complains of the *Jews*: That when He had fed them to the full, instead of looking up to the Hand that gave, and praising the Liberality of their bountiful Benefactor, They as-
 Jer. 5. 7. *sembled themselves by Troops in the Harlots Houses.* Whether this be to be understood in the Letter, or the Figure, it represents a most monstrous Ingratitude, by suffering the Devil to direct them in the Application of those Things of which God had given them the Use. Prosperity, which in it self is a real Blessing, is thus turned into a substantial Curse, and the Offenders in this Point are as much the Objects of God's Justice, as he who receives a Pension from his Prince, and employs it in Rebellion against his Crown and Dignity: And what do such Men do less, who make God's Blessings subservient to their Lusts and Passions, than turn, as it were, His own Artillery upon
 on

on Him, and fight Him, as we say, at His own Weapons? When the Man of Power lends his Name to skreen the Guilty, and to oppress the Innocent; and when the Wealthy shall lay out his Store only to feed his Vanity, and gratify his Appetites; when Wit and Parts are employed in the Defence of Errors and Immoralities, what is this, but transcribing the Action, and incurring the Penalty of those foolish *Israelites*, who, to their own Shame and Dishonour, employed the Jewels God had given them to the making a Molten Calf, and bringing a Plague upon themselves and their Posterity? *Shall I not visit for these Things, saith the Lord? Shall not my Soul be avenged on such a Nation as this?*

'Tis a Principle and Law of Nature, to do good to those who do good to us. The very Beasts act conformably hereunto: *For the Ox knoweth his Owner, and the Ass his Master's Crib.* Isa. 1. 3. The dullest, and most heavy Creatures, are not without some Tokens of Affection to those who feed them. Now for any to break this well known Law, and to be so far from observing the Obligation that it lays upon them, as to offer Violence to it by a downright contrary Behaviour; is an Indication of a Temper inferior to the late mentioned Brutes, laying Claim to the Correction of the Goad and Bridle much more than they. And, *Therefore shall not I visit for these Things, saith the Lord? Shall not my Soul be avenged on such a Nation as this?*

4thly, 'Tis a natural Transition from Luxury to Atheism. *Lest I be full, and say, who is the Lord?* Prov. 30. 9 Says Agur. When a Man has broke Bounds, and given a Loose to lawless Desires, and indulged himself in the Accomplishment of them, he is

glad to entertain Thoughts of Impunity. The Holy Psalmist long ago made this Observation, that the Corruptions of Men were the Causes of Infidelity. *The Fool hath said in his Heart there is no God*; the Reason follows, *because they are corrupt, and have done abominable Works*, and therefore hope, by the Denial of a God, to escape Punishment. Besides, Sensuality has a natural Tendency to efface all Notices of Virtue, and to stifle and suppress every Motion of Good, which makes St. Paul term those who live in Pleasure, *Dead while they live*: The Reason is, because as the Soul is the Life of the Body, God is the Life of the Soul: And as the Body without the Soul is dead; so the Soul without God is dead also*. And no Account is to be made of the worse Part after the Loss of the better. As long as Men continue in any sinful Course, their State is hazardous, but when God thus fatally suffers one Sin to be the Punishment of another, evil Motions of the Heart to super-induce Blindness of Mind, their Case is to be pronounced desperate and incurable: There is no way left for their Recovery without a Miracle. For they who have so notoriously abused God's Mercies, will not, 'tis likely, be awakened by his Judgments. Hence the Prophet says, *They will bely the Lord, and say it is not He, neither shall Evil come upon us, neither shall we see Sword nor Famine*. When any Calamity overtakes them, when any Danger threatens them, it is by such Men consider'd as the Effect of second Causes only, without any regard had to the Agency of the first. The natural Man receiveth not the Things of God, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. They are not to be distinguished by a reprobate Mind (a Mind void of Judgment, as the Margin explains it, to shew, that all Wickedness is Folly,

Isal. 14. 1.

* Aug.

Tract. 47.

in Joann.

Jer. 5. 12.

1 Cor.

2. 14.

Rom. 1.

28.

Folly, as well with regard to temporal Concerns as spiritual) but only to be accounted for, by the Direction of that convincing Spirit, who will *not dwell where Uncleanneſs entreth in.*

5thly, *He who hath no Hope in God, is of all Men the leaſt able to ſupport himſelf:* He ſtands in need of more external Aid and Aſſiſtance than other People, and his Purſuit after it, is, generally ſpeaking, proportionate to his Want. Like the Pharifees, he will *compaſs Sea and Land to make* Mat. 23. *Profelytes,* for by Numbers only is he kept in Coun- 15. *tenance,* and his Infidelity, as he may think, juſtified. This, our Prophet calls, *Setting a Trap,* Ver. 26. *and catching Men.* Now, although this be the more famous Senſe of the Text, yet are there other ſubordinate offensive Snares, which make the Layers of them ſinful *Catchers of Men* alſo. As for Inſtance, when a Man commits an Act formally ſinful, whereby another is encouraged to do the ſame by his Example, as in the Caſe of *Jeroboam* and his Calves at *Dan* and *Bethel*; this is ſetting a Trap, and catching Men. Or if he betray any one who has a Dependance upon him, to do a Thing in its own Nature indifferent, which yet he ſhall think wrong or ſinful, as in the Caſe of *Joab's* 2 Sam. 24. *numbring the People at the command of David.* Though the Sin be formally the Doers, radically it is his who gave the Occaſion. Or, again, he who employs his Learning or Counſel, to ſeduce or miſlead Men, or his Power and Authority to intimidate or afright them, or the Agreeableneſs of his Converſation to perſwade or intice them to act contrary to their Duty or Intereſt, as in the Caſe of publick Elections is too commonly done, ſets ſo many Traps, and *catches Men.* To this Head may be brought all Fraud and Circumven-
tion

tion in Traffick, Deceit in Trade, false Weights and Measures; taking Advantage of a Man's Weakness to over-reach him; Usury and Extortion; setting, as it is called, a good Face upon a bad Matter, and the like. By such Arts as these, Jer. 5. 28. says the Prophet, *they are waxen fat, they shine*; that is, they are arrived at plentiful Fortunes and large Estates, sumptuous Equipages, and splendid Titles — *Right Honourable* it may be, and *Right Reverend* Sinners, having as much Pre-eminence in Place as Impiety. When the Talents God has given us are so mis-employed; especially, when his Truth is either denied or perverted, and the Apostacy studiously propagated and defended, this is a worse Way of catching or *stealing Men*, Ver. 24. 7. than that mentioned in *Deuteronomy*, for which Death was denounc'd; and if it fatally prevail, as in the *Jewish State*, and there ariseth no Body on God's part, it is then to be expected that He Isa. 1. 24. should plead His own Cause, and *ease Him of His Adversaries*. And when God shall visit for these Things, Instances tell us, that Wealth and Power are no Security against his destroying Angel; but on the contrary, that the fattest Sinners, for whose sake His Wrath is kindled, are Psal. 78. the fittest Sacrifices to His Vengeance. *He gave them their own Desire*, says the Psalmist, *they were not estranged from their Lust*. But while the Meat was yet in their Mouths, in the midst of their luxurious Repast, the Wrath of God came upon them, and slew the fattest, that is, the Wealthiest of them.

Jer. 5. 28. 6thly, The next Charge runs for Injustice; *They judge not the Cause, the Cause of the Fatherless, and the Right of the needy do they not judge.*

The Holy Scriptures are every where so full of Cautions against Iniquities of this Sort, that I should trespass upon your Patience as much in reciting them, as do Injury to your Understanding in proving them to be barbarous and unnatural, and worthy of Divine Vengeance. They who know least the Charge of the Magistrate, conclude, That it is his Duty to preserve Men in the Possession of their Rights, and to keep them from Acts of Violence and Injustice. When he more immediately sustains the Person of God, and we see Him in the Seat of Judgment, we cannot but expect righteous Determinations, and an exact Impartiality. *Shall not the Judge of all the Earth do right?* Gen. 18. And ought not His Representatives to pursue the same indispensable Measures? They who act otherwise betray the Honour of their Principal, by prostituting His Authority, to countenance or establish what He professes to dislike. The Judgment is said to be *the Lord's*, Deut. 1.17 because all good humane Laws are founded upon the divine; and when they are either destroyed or perverted, which is much the same, it is Time, in the Opinion of the Royal Politician, for the Lord to lay to his Hand for the Support of it. Psal. 119. 126.

7. *Lastly*, There is no surer Sign of God's giving a Nation over to Destruction, than when the Law shall perish from the Priest, or, in the Apostle's Words, *when God shall send a People such strong Delusion, that they shall believe a Lye.* Ezek. 7.26. 2 Thes. 2. 11.

Of all Temptations none are so dangerous as those which come covered with the Vail of Holiness, and pretend to Authority from God.

Every

Every Sin so received will be to him whom it possesses, what *Ramoth-Gilead* was to *Abab*, the sure Means of Destruction, though Four Hundred Prophets prophesy Peace. When they whose peculiar Office it is, by their Life and Doctrine to direct the People in the right Way, shall, to humour the Extravagances of a depraved Age, suit their Doctrine to the Inclinations of their Hearers, and make the Word of God bend to serve the Purposes of Irreligion ; when they advance nothing contrary to the Lusts and Passions of their Rulers, but through a fearful, unapostolical, slavish Compliance, call *Evil, Good ; and Good, Evil ; put Bitter for Sweet, and Sweet for Bitter ;* when they wrest and torture Scripture to make it give an Occasional Vote ; when they say, Thus saith the Lord, and the Lord hath not said so : Such ungodly Prevaricators, like the evil Angels among the *Egyptians*, are the Pourers out of *Wrath, Indignation, and Trouble*. This was, to speak in the Language of the Prophet, the wonderful and horrible Case of the *Jews*, *The Prophets among them prophesied falsely, and the Priests, who should discover the Imposture, countenance it, because they bear Rule by their Means, and my People love to have it so, and what will ye do in the End thereof?*

I have now done with my first Enquiry, and shewn for what Offences Almighty God will visit a People, viz. For open Profaneness and Hypocrisy ; for persisting in Evil under means of Conviction ; for abusing His Mercies ; for the Propagation of Atheism and Infidelity ; for Fraud and Circumvention in secular Affairs ; for neglecting or perverting Justice and Judgment ; and above all, for the scandalous Prevarication of those

those who ought to be faithful Dispensers of the Word of God. I proceed now,

II. *To attempt a Vindication of Divine Providence in punishing these several Enormities.*

This I hope will be done effectually, if I make it appear, that such a Vindictive Proceedure is Natural, Reasonable, and Necessary; and even according to our own Stipulation, Just.

First then, For the Nature of it.

With regard to Consequences, I take it, that there is the same immutable Law to the Moral World, as to the Physical or Natural: That is to say, As in the Natural World, every Tree, and every Plant bears Fruit after its Kind, whose Seed is in it self; so in the Moral, every Action that a Man does and consents to, is attended with suitable Consequences; the Goodness or Malignity of an Action being productive, as the Seed of a Plant, after its Kind: Now since nothing that is, did, or could produce it self; it follows, that the stated Laws of Nature must alter, before any Thing can be produced, but from its Likeness: That is to say, Before any Thing that is good can naturally proceed from any Thing that is evil; or any Thing that is evil be naturally produced from any Thing that is good. Our Saviour himself thus reasons from the Laws of Nature to Morality; *A good Tree, says He, Mat. 7. 18. cannot bring forth evil Fruit; neither can a corrupt Tree bring forth good Fruit: Where He gives us to understand, that as in Nature, Causes produce regular Effects, and we may judge of the one by the other reciprocally, so in Morals, it is*
D but

but examining the Nature of the Action to know what it will consequentially bring forth : Or else, The Effect will, by taking up Deductions, shew from what Cause it originally springs : So then when any Affliction or Misfortune does befall us, it is unnatural to say it cometh of it self, for *Affliction cometh not forth of the Dust, neither doth Trouble spring out of the Ground*, (saith Job) that is, These Things are not casual or spontaneous, for *Man is born to Trouble, as the Sparks fly upwards* ; that is, naturally : His Troubles are the regular Effect of some antecedent Cause, and if his Calamities are evil, they must arise from Evil, be the Fruit of some former Wickedness he has been guilty of. Surely thus there is, there must be some hidden Cause, some secret Reason, of which every Man's own Conscience is the best Judge, to be assign'd for all the Burdens and Distress, the Tribulation and Anguish that Men endure ; according as they behave themselves so it fares with them, and their Manners or Morals make their Fortune either a Plague or a Blessing.

2. When an Injury is done 'tis natural and regular that Satisfaction be required, which if the Offender refuse to give, Justice will warrant the taking it by Force. By sinning we do Injury to Almighty God, in that we requite Him Evil for Good, and transgress His Law, and by Consequence become liable to the Penalties of it. All the Satisfaction we are capable of making, is by Repentance and Amendment to break off our wicked Actions, and to lead a new Life ; which if we neglect to do, we have Reason to expect the Consequences of Disobedience. *If thou dost well, (says God) shalt thou not be accepted ? but if thou*

thou dost evil, Sin lieth at the Door : That is, the Punishment due to Sin is ready to break in upon thee. To this give all the Prophets Witness, that if a Man will not turn and repent, He will whet His Deut. 32. glittering Sword, and make bare His Arm : Since 41. we provoke Him every Day, though He be patient, Psal. 7. 12. yet is He strong ; patient to teach Man Knowledge, and strong to punish the Misuse of it ; having most solemnly declar'd His Resolution, that He will by no means clear the guilty. Exod. 34. 7

When *Moses* made a Repetition of the Law, to fix it the deeper in the Minds of that rebellious People to whom it was deliver'd, after the most gracious Promises to make their Duty their Delight, and their Obedience hearty and sincere ; for Fear lest Happiness should make them careless, and their Security forget its Author, with a Voice like the Voice of mighty Thundrings, he denounced Rev. 19. 6. against the disobedient such Plagues as are frightful but to think of, How dreadful then to lie under ? It shall come to pass, says he, if thou wilt Deut. 28. not hearken to the Voice of the Lord thy God, to ob- 15. serve to do all His Commandments, and His Statutes which I command thee this Day, that all these Curses shall come upon thee and overtake thee. Cursed shalt thou be in the City, and cursed shalt thou be in the Field. Cursed shall be thy Basket and thy Store. Cursed shall be the Fruit of thy Body, and the Fruit of thy Land, the Increase of thy Kine, and the Flocks of thy Sheep. Cursed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and cursed shalt thou be when thou goest out. The Lord shall send upon thee Cursing, Vexation, and Rebuke, in all that thou settest thine Hand unto for to do. The Lord shall smite thee with a Consumption, and with a Fever, and with an Inflammation, and with extreme Burning, and with the Sword, and

with Blasting, and with Mildew, and they shall pursue thee till thou perish. And thy Heaven that is over thy Head shall be Brass, and the Earth that is under thee shall be Iron. The Fruit of thy Land, and all thy Labours shall a Nation which thou knowest not eat up, and thou shalt be only oppressed and crushed alway. The Lord shall bring thee and thy King which thou shalt set over thee, unto a Nation which neither thou nor thy Fathers have known : And there thou shalt serve other Gods, Wood and Stone. And thou shalt become an Astonishment, a Proverb, and a By-word among all Nations. Now by a fair and easy Application we may see, why, and how Mankind is so constantly, so variously, tormented. Every Sin we commit challenges the Vengeance due to it ; and how secretly or artificially soever it be committed or carried on, it will naturally at length find us out. Hence may we account for Sedition in the City, and Barrenness in the Field. Hence may we gather the Cause of Affairs going backward, and Men becoming Bankrupts. Hence we hear Cries in the Family, and Complaints in the Streets : Hence may we derive the Unnaturalness of Children, and the Unfaithfulness of Servants. Hence may we discover the Spring of our Disappointments and Defeat in our Enterprizes. Hence may we know the Seeds of our Diseases, and the Causes of sundry Kinds of Death. Hence it comes that the Children are ejected, and Strangers divide the Inheritance:

Lam. 5. 2. Hence we have seen Princes become *Vagabonds*,
 Psal. 109. and beg their Bread, and Nobles seek it out of
 9. desolate Places. Hence arise National Judgments and Private Calamities. Hence come
 2 Cor. 7. 5. Fightings without, and Fears within, and it must needs be so, for the Mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

2. Since it has pleased Almighty God to annex the Promises of this Life, as well as that to come, to Obedience; I think the Opposition is but reasonable and necessary, that Disobedience should be attended with the Plagues of both also; otherwise the World, bad as it is, wou'd still become worse: Should an unrighteous Man meet no Opposition, or Rebuke, in his unrighteous Path; Should he who leads the *Life of the Wicked* al-ways seem to *die the Death of the Righteous*, how contagious would such Examples be? How few wou'd resist a Temptation to o'erleap the Bounds of Modesty, Plain-Dealing and Humility, to gratify a sensual Inclination, to increase their Store, or to feed their Vanity? Let but a dazling Bait be hung in View, and the mis of it the only Punishment, and what unnatural Strides will Men take to come at it? Neither the Dictates of Humanity would be persuasive, nor the Obligations of Friendship binding, nor the Ties of Nature strong enough to stop the Career of a lawless Desire. Therefore it is both reasonable and necessary for the well-being of Mankind, that some be singled out for publick Examples, that others may see and fear, and *do no more wickedly*. Num. 23. 10.

Judgment inflicted upon an *Elymas* may confirm the weak Christian, and recal the Backslidden: And he, who like *Zimri*, has afflicted the Good by a scandalous Life, should terrify the Wicked by a surprizing Death. In private Affairs likewise, if through prevalence of Custom, or Example, a Man's Morals come to be so depraved, as that he can reconcile his personal Wickedness to the Rules of Honesty and Virtue: If he has no other Measure of Good and Evil but Success; if
Fraud

Prov. 28.
20.

Fraud or Deceit, or any other undue Means, have made him Opulent and Wealthy; if his Estate be the Gatherings of Injustice, or is possess'd with Diffidence, or enjoy'd with Unthankfulness; or if a Man's Original be mean, and his Circumstances narrow; if he guiltily *makes haste to be Rich* (and they who do so, says Solomon, cannot be innocent); if he puts his whole Trust in Man for Redress, and makes *an Arm of Flesh his only Support*; in these Cases Reason and Necessity do both require, that his Folly be detected and made apparent, at least to himself, that his Hopes be blasted, and his Expectations brought to nought, to teach him his Duty, to vindicate Providence, that it hath a Regard to Human Affairs, and above all to save his Soul. And this we see often come to pass, sometimes ordinarily, and sometimes extraordinarily: For Instance, How frequently are the Vices of the Father punished in the Disobedience of the Son? The Wickedness of the Prince in the Rebellion of the Subject? And the Iniquity of the Priest in the Stubbornness of the People? How usually do the sworn Partners of Injustice turn Accusers one of another? Often are well concerted Measures broken in the Execution of them, and the over-flowing Cup of Joy, by an unseen Hand, dash'd with Gall in a Moment. Or, if all seem well and pleasing without; if the Brow be smooth, and the Forehead without wrinkle, yet Conscience, like a Ghost, will haunt this garnished Sepulchre; and, for the above-said Reasons, display the Rottenness and Deformity within.

3. The severe Dispensations of Providence I take to be, according to our own Stipulation, just.

When

When God made a Covenant with our Father *Abraham*, and in him with all his Descendants, the manner of making it was as follows. We read that *He took an Heifer of three Years old, and a Gen. 15. She-Goat and a Ram, and divided them in the midst, and laid each Piece one against another. And it came to pass, that when the Sun was down, and it was dark, behold a smoaking Furnace, and a burning Lamp, that passed between those Pieces.* Now, since God never promises but conditionally, we conclude, that *Abraham* also passed between the Pieces, in his own Person, as well as the Lord in those two fiery Representations. The Meaning of which Ceremony is this; God, to shew the Immutability of his Promise made to our Fore-father *Abraham*, condescended to declare it by a Custom (afterwards at least) of Men, which was, in making Leagues and Covenants, to slay Cattle, and cutting them in Pieces, solemnly to pass between the Parts so divided, thereby interchangeably signifying, and expressing a mutual Willingness and Desire, that the Party which should violate the Covenant then made between them, should become as those slaughtered Beasts. And this 'tis likely our blessed Saviour alludes to, when speaking of the evil Servant, he says, *His Lord shall come and cut him in sunder.* So that hence it appears, that we our selves, in the Person of our Father *Abraham*, have agreed to the Infliction of Divine Vengeance upon our selves, if we fail to perform our Part of the Conditions. And, therefore, what Injustice does any Man receive at the Hand of God, when he pleases to afflict? May not He say to him, as the good Man in the Gospel to the grumbling dissatisfied Labourer, *I do thee no wrong, take that is thine, didst thou not agree with me?*

Hence

Hence all Cavilling and Murmur, all Repining and Complaint, at those Dispensations of Providence which make us smart, appear impious as well as vain. The worst we endure in this Life, falls far short of our Deserts; and the good Things we enjoy, are more than the best of us can lay claim to by Virtue of any Merit. And shall we receive the good Things of mere Grace and Favour, and not the Evil of Desert? Is it natural, or reasonable, to hope for the Gifts of God, without being ever paid the Wages of Sin? Or, can we expect to use the Means, and not arrive at the End they lead to, and where we our selves have consented to go?

Which brings me to my

III. Third General, which is to set before you, *What I apprehend to be the proper Business of a Religious Fast, viz. The Causes of this our solemn Assembly, and our Apprehension of God's just Visitation.*

And here I am directed, by the Royal Authority, to say, *That We are met this Day for obtaining Pardon of our Sins, and averting those heavy Judgments which they have most justly deserved; and, particularly, for beseeching God to preserve us from the Plague, with which several other Countries still continue to be visited.*

To the Accomplishment of so desirable an End, it is necessary to see what those Sins are which may have incensed God against us, for which we are to humble our selves before him this Day; for we can expect no Pardon without Confession and Repentance; 'tis the only Way
we

we have left, by penitential Shame and Sorrow, to avoid the judicial Visitation which we are at present afraid of. *He that covereth his Sins, saith Prov. 28. Solomon, shall not prosper, but whose confesseth and forsaketh them shall have Mercy.*

Here I must beg leave to re-assume the Chapter of the Text, to every Instance of which we of this Nation have drawn an unhappy Parallel; and he who would perform the Duty of a Prophet among us conscientiously, may make every Charge there exhibited against the *Jews*, by no unnatural Application, affect us also.

'Tis an unpleasant Task I am undertaking, but at this Time by no means to be avoided, as a Matter of the last Concern: It would be an impious Absurdity, on a Day of Humiliation, to draw a Veil over our Crimes, or to palliate our Offences; this wou'd invite the Vengeance we intend to deprecate, and be like the *Israelites* proclaiming *a* Ex. 32. *Fast unto the Lord, and sacrificing to a Golden Calf.*

I wish I could say with the Apostle, that I had *nothing to accuse my Nation of*; or could complain *Acts 28. with less Truth than the Prophet, that the whole* 19. *Head is sick, and the whole Heart faint. From the Isa. 1. 5, 6. Sole of the Foot unto the Head there is no Soundness in it, but Wounds and Bruises, and putrifying Sores.*

But I am afraid I do no wrong to my Country, in affirming, That those Sins which our Text threatens to visit for, are at as great an Height among us now, as among the *Jews* in the Time of *Jeremiah*.

1. Our open Contempt of God's Law, and our Saviour's Precept, is manifest in the common Practice of Swearing, so scandalously frequent both with the Base and Honourable. 'Tis true, we have good and wholesome Laws enacted against Prophaneness and Immorality, but they are so lamely executed, that I dare say, were the Number of Convictions upon an Act of almost thirty Years standing to be inquired into, they would not exceed the several Publications of it, in that Time, in the Church. The Judgment upon our Neighbour Nation, remarkable for this vicious Custom, shews us, that God will not always decline the bold Challenges we send him, nor be deaf to the Imprecations we make upon our selves or others: He who has been so often summoned to come down and witness to our Extravagancies and Impieties, will, we see at length, appear, tho' to a quite different Purpose, and make us know and feel, that His Great and Holy Name is not to be trifled with, or blasphemed, with Impunity.

2. If we advance higher, and speak of taking God's Name in vain, in Acts of deliberate Perjury, the better Part of this Audience, who are acquainted with judicial Proceffes, can, I believe, attest, that this abominable Wickedness is not uncommon, because it must go for the most part unpunished. To this, I fear, may be added, the Practice of many in Places of Trust, the necessary Business of which makes the Use of an Oath Customary and Familiar, and consequently destroys the Reverence that is due to so sacred a Matter*.

* Hier. in
Pyth. Aur.
Car.

And now, considering in these two Cases only, how many there are who almost daily renounce
the

the Divine Mercy, and imprecate God's Judgments upon them and their Posterity, we cannot but conclude, that God, who is appealed to as an Avenger, will visit us for these Things; and that, unless our Repentance prevent it, this Land will be like the Land of Judah, which *mourneth because* Jer. 23. 10. *of Swearing.*

We may ask our selves that Question of *Moses*, Deut. 4. 7. *What Nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all Things that we call upon him for? He has guided our Counsels, and gone forth with our Armies; He gave us almost uninterrupted Victory in Battle, till He had secured to us the Blessing of Peace; He has preserved our Religion, and not yet deprived us of our Liberties: And, What have we render'd unto* Psal. 116. *the Lord for all these Benefits He hath done unto us?* 11. We have made little or no use of these Blessings to the Improvement either of Piety or Morality, but like *Jesurun* have waxed fat and kicked, turned Deut. 32. the Gifts of our Benefactor to other Purposes than ^{15.} He intended. *Shall I not visit for these Things, saith the Lord? Shall not my Soul be avenged on such a Nation as this?*

3. On the other Hand, how often has God corrected us and we have been incorrigible? How often has He made us suffer Adversity, and we refused to be thereby reclaimed? Winds and Storms, and intemperate Seasons, have had no good Effect upon us; Ruin of Credit abroad, and the Decay of Trade at home, we have not placed as a Balance to our provoking Sins, nor have we been more frugal, altho' we have been less wealthy.

Prov.
24. 34.

Iſa. 1.
5, 23.

1 Sam.
3. 12.

Since the deſtructive Execution of a late felonious Scheme, which has brought *Poverty upon us as one that travelleth, and Want as an armed Man*, what Abatement have we obſerved in our Pride and Luxury? What Tokens of Humiliation for ſo fatal a Blow, which has dealt more Unhappineſs to us on a ſudden, than the two dreadful Years of Peſtilence and Fire, added to all the Calamities of a bloody and expensive War. Whoever looks upon this Miſfortune with a religious Eye, will diſcover in it a National Judgment for the National Crimes of Avarice and Ambition, which ſpread themſelves almoſt over every Order and Degree of Men among us, and in attempting to corrupt the Representatives of our Nation, would have made them like the *Jewiſh Sanhedrim* and Conſistory, which by the Prophet's Account, muſt have been a Body of as deſignedly wicked Men, as ever met together to betray a Conſtitution. But have the Miſeries we lie under brought us to a Senſe of our Duty? Have they made us call our paſt Ways to remembrance, and examine for what Cauſe this Evil is come upon us? Does the unjuſt Dealer conſider his Loſs as a providential Reſumption of ill-gotten Wealth, or He who truſted in his Riches, reflect upon the Vanity of his Confidence? Does the worldly wiſe Man upon this Account, leſs glory in his Wiſdom, and make the confounding his Devices the Abatement of his Pride? If ſo 'tis well, and we hope the worſt is over-paſt: If not, God will ſtill maintain his Controverſy with us, till either we ſubmit, or are conſumed, *When I begin*, ſays He, *I will alſo make an End.*

4. The Charge of Injustice which the Prophet brings against the *Jews*, for not *judging the Cause of the Fatherless, and the Right of the Needy*, terminates not in a Court of Judicature, as regarding only the Abuse of legal Proceedings; where all Falshoods in Evidence, all Partial Verdicts, all Prevarication in Pleading, all Defences of bad Causes, every Straining the Laws, are allowed to be so many deliberate Acts of Sin, and Provocations of Divine Vengeance, in which who can say we are less culpable than the *Jews*? I say it does not terminate here, but the *Cause of the Fatherless is not judged*, when Guardians, publick or private, defraud Orphans of their Due, or act not for them to the best Advantage; the *Right of the Needy* is invaded, when the Labourer is defrauded, or kept out of his Hire, or when a Master behaves indecently to his Servant, or a Creditor to his Debtor; and Oppressions of this Sort God has promised to avenge, upon the least Application of the Parties aggrieved: *If thou* Exod. 22. *afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me,* 23, 24. *I will surely hear their Cry. And my Wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the Sword, and your Wives shall be Widows, and your Children Fatherless.*

Let our Jayls and Prisons then tell us the Danger we are in from pure Cruelty and Unmercifulness; let late flourishing Families inform us of the fatal Effects of Usury and Extortion; let the hardy Seaman, who *puts his Life in his Hand*, 1 Sam. 19. and goeth forth, tell those who take Advantage of his Necessity, that their unjust Gain is the *Price of* Mat. 27. 6. *Blood*; let them do any Thing but cry against us, lest God visit us for these Things, and His Soul

Soul arise to be avenged on such a Nation as this.

5. We shall be the less surprized at these Things, when we pass into the Temple of the Lord, and Mic. 3. 14. see the *wonderful and horrible Thing*—*the Priests teaching for Hire, and the Prophets divining for Money, or Preferment: Suiting their Doctrines to the Times, and forbearing, at least, if not allowing the Vices of the great and powerful.* I do not remember to have read or heard of any modern Sermon at Court, against the Vices and Temptations most incident to high and exalted Stations; such as, Bribery, or Corruption, or Riot, or Luxury, or the probable Iniquities of a Masquerade. But Love, and Peace, and Charity, and Forbearance, and Toleration, the Duty of Ministers of the Gospel, and *Cæsar's* undisputed Title, which are in themselves very good Topicks, properly insisted on, are there excellently well displayed and inculcated into an Audience, whose Sphere of Action requires, for the most Part, monitory Discourses of another Nature. And would to God this were the worst; and that Fearfulness, or Flattery, or Omissions, were our greatest Faults: But when Doctrines are advanced in direct Contradiction to the plainest Words of Scripture; when we are told, That a Man of quick Parts, and excellent Abilities, though of a confessedly profligate and vicious Life, shall soon reconcile himself to the Favour of God, by his quick Sense, and Readiness of Application; while a dull Sinner must go a round-about Way, with the Apostle, and *work out his Salvation with* Phil. 2. 12. *Fear and Trembling*, and a long Repentance; I say, when we are thus taught, that God is a Respector of Persons, and He has declar'd Himself

self to be *no Respector of Persons*, either His Truth ^{2 Sam. 14.} must *fail*, which He will not suffer; or to vindicate and prove it, He must *arise and visit*. Again, ^{14. A^d 10. 34.}

^{34.} Psal. 89.

When a Church established by Law, is taken ^{33.} from under the Care of the Magistrate, who is the Guardian of the Law; and the Indolence of an Heathen Ruler, laid down as a Practical Guide to a Christian Governor. This is to reduce Religion to its Primitive State indeed in one Sense, when it was upheld by Miracles. And in a like Case the Interposition and Protection of Heaven is no doubt unquestionable; but whether we should deserve Miracles of Mercy, or Miracles of Judgment upon such an Occasion, let our selves be Judges.

I must confess, according to late received Notions, they who throw down the Fences of the Church may seem to be justified: For, If *Christ's* John 18. *Kingdom be not of this World*, that is to say, if He ^{36.} has left no visible humane Authority to govern His People as such, but every Man may do *what is* Deut. 12. *right in his own Eyes*, provided he be sincere, and be ^{8.} allowed to form his own Notions of Sincerity also, and be thereby entitled to the Favour of God; if this, I say, be sound Doctrine, then there lies no Obligation upon any Man to submit, either to Magistrate or Minister, for Conscience Sake, whose Inclination shall lead him to behave contemptuously. And thus likewise Virtue and Vice, Religion and Irreligion, Praise and Dispraise, Evil Report and Good Report, are put upon the same Level, and our Obligations to practise the one, provided we be sincere, that is, either conscientious or humourfome, are as great and strong as to the Performance of the other. If this be the

Gal. 5. 1. the *Liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free*; if
 Rom. 8. 21 *this be the glorious Liberty of the Sons of God*
 sure I am that it was unknown to the Apostles and
 Primitive Christians; and looks more like expo-
 sition than explaining that Gospel we have at pre-
 sent: And, perhaps, for that Reason, imboldned
 a late arrogant Author to offer us one from the
Turk, and with Assurance to compliment a
 Prelate in Order to its Propagation *.

* See the
 Pref. to Tol-
 land's Na-
 zareus.

When Scripture is brought to countenance all
 Opinions, the Beauty of Holiness must be de-
 stroyed, which consists in Unity and Uniformity,
 and a right Belief is no more advantageous than
 a wrong; as is the *Jew*, so is the *Gentile*, and the
Christian; and he who *sincerely* professeth Chri-
 stianity, no better than he who *sincerely* laugh-
 eth it to Scorn: If the Gospel suffers it self to
 be so used, nay, more, entitles a Man to the Fa-
 vour of God for so doing, provided he be sin-
 cere; it will follow, that the true Beauty of Ho-
 liness will be as various as our Schisms and Divi-
 sions are; whereas its principal Parts are, exter-
 nally, a National Uniformity in Rites and Cere-
 monies, and *speaking the same Thing*; internally,
 being of *the same Mind*. And Separations and
 Divisions are, I think, far from being Beauties
 in a Body Politick; unless what is torn and man-
 gled be esteemed more beautiful than what is
 sound and entire.

1 Cor. 1.
 10.

You may remember that I disclaimed all Hy-
 pocrisy and Diffimulation, at the Beginning of
 this Discourse: Here then I cannot but affirm,
 that I look upon the modern Growth and Encou-
 ragement of Schism, the open Profession of
 Heresy, the numerous daily Attacks made upon
 our

our Church, to be justly chargeable upon the corrupt Explication of those Words of our Saviour — *My Kingdom is not of this World* ; where-^{John 18.} by a greater Latitude has been given to Men de-^{36.} firous of Change, than ever the Church yet thought of, or approved. Nay, Popery it self, to which it directly tends, never at its worst allowed such unconditional Indulgences. I say it directly tends to Popery, for if all Restraint be taken away, and all Men are suffered to follow their own Inventions, the least wise, which is always the greatest Part of Mankind, will, at last, weary with wandring, and not knowing either how to fix or return, be glad to throw it self under the Protection of an Infallible Guide.

In Consequence of these destructive Doctrines, numberless are the Attacks of impious and profane Men upon every Part of our Ecclesiastical Constitution : And no marvel after the Ordinances of God are despised, if the Ordinances of Man come to be disesteemed, and a Church, like a City, be broken up, which is betrayed within at the same Time as she is beleaguer'd without.

When the great ones of our Church become the Breakers down of her Walls, what will not an Adversary attempt, yea, what may he not comfortably expect ? *If this be done in a green*^{Luke 23.} *Tree, what shall be done in a dry ?* After this it^{31.} will be no Wonder, if some out of a base Compliance to the Extravagance of a vicious Age, shall take external Communion, and the visible Beauty of Holiness from the Church, and affirm them to be more properly in a Masquerade:

*London
Journal, of
Nov. 25,
and Dec. 2.

If to all this we add the Revival of the *Arian* and *Socinian* Heresies, which commit such foul Outrages upon our Articles of Faith, and Means of Salvation ; the weekly Defence of Treason or Sacrilege * ; the open Profanation of the Lord's-Day, more especially in a neighbouring City, and the Out-Parts of this ; the Multitudes of disorderly People who infest our Streets ; the infernal Clubs and Societies for the Propagation of Vice and Immorality ; the Encouragement given to Theatres, while the Houses of God lie neglected and forsaken, together with the general Indolence of Mankind towards a Reformation. I say, If we consider these Things, and withal how few there are who lay it to Heart, we must own we have sufficient Reasons to fear God's *just Visitation for these Things, and that He will arise to be avenged on such a Nation as this.* Every unpented Crime cries for Vengeance, but every allowed one formally challenges it as due : And what are Crimes but allowed, when they who have the Power of Restraint suffer them to be committed with Impunity ?

1 Kings 8.
38.

Behold, I have made an Evangelical Presentment of these Things ; suffer it, I beseech you, ye Men of Power, to be as valid as a Legal one. It is not enough for us to say, we our selves are not guilty of so doing ; for the Sins of others will be imputed to us, if we neglect to find out, reprove, and punish them. In vain shall we build Barracks for restoring the Sick, and preserving the Sound, unless we first remove *every Man the Plague of his own Heart*, and endeavour after the like cleansing of his Neighbours, then we may fiducially join this Issue with God's Providence for

for our Preservation ; or, which is more likely,
by thus taking away the Cause, the Effect will
be prevented, and the Lord successfully *intreated* 2 Sam. 24.
for our Land. 25.

I have been thinking what we already have to
plead in our Favour, why Sentence should not
pass against us, according as we have deserved.
And I hope we have some Reliance upon these
Four Things.

1. The First is that National Vote, at the In-
stigation of our late Queen, of ever Blessed and
truly Glorious Memory, for erecting Fifty new
Churches to the Honour and Service of Almighty
God ; thereby after having prevented the Growth
of Schism, religiously providing Room for those
who should return into the Church.

2. The Second is, The commendable Zeal of
some * truly Noble and Christian Spirits, lately
exerted in the Cause of God, against the Errors
and Heresies which are sprung up amongst us.
May there never be wanting a Succession of such
distinguishing Lights to *shine before Men*, to lead Mat. 5. 16
them in the right Way, to the *Glory of our Fa-
ther which is in Heaven.*

3. The Third is, The great Goodness of His
Majesty, in redeeming His Captive Subjects, set-

* See the Right Honourable the Earl of Nottingham's An-
swer to Mr. Whiston : The Right Reverend Bishop of Oxford,
the Dean of Chichester, Worcester, and Dr. Snape, their
Pieces against the late Bishop of Bangor : Dr. Waterland's
Vindication of Christ's Divinity : Mr. Nelson against Dr.
Clark, &c.

ting them free who were fast bound in Misery and Iron, and restoring them to true Religion and Liberty. May God, *by whom Kings reign*, restore this His *Labour of Love* sevenfold into His Bosom, and make Him know and feel that Acts of Mercy and Compassion are a better Security to His Person and Government, than the *Spear and Shield*, than His Fleets and Armies.

4. The last and best is, The Increase and Encouragement of Schools of Charity, which are indeed a National Goodness, and the likeliest Means, under God, to suppress Wickedness and Vice, and to promote Religion and Virtue. Who knows but this Provision that the Generations to come may be righteous, may happily atone for the Licentiousness of this? And that God who seeth Things to come as though they were present, and *calleth Things that are not as though they were*, may spare a present guilty Race, in Prospect of a succeeding pious one? Sure I am, that the more Examples of Charity and Mercy we can shew, the more Reason have we to hope for Favour and Forbearance; and that our Intercessor, who reckons himself benefited by our Liberalities of this Sort, will therefore become our Saviour, will interpose in our Behalf in this our Day of Danger, and hide us under the Shadow of His Wings, until His Father's *Indignation be overpast*.

Rom. 4.
17.

Isa. 26. 20.

I will relieve your Patience when I shall have made some Remarks upon the Design and Observation of a Religious Fast.

The End of such Appointments is ^{that} That we
ould all of us humble our selves before God,
and

and before Men in publick Assemblies, and openly bewail our many provoking Sins, and be afflicted, and mourn, and weep, and repent, to avert the heavy Judgments and Desolations, which threaten a sinful Land, for the *Wickedness* Psal. 107.
of them that dwell therein. 34.

'Tis true, that Grief or Sorrow is a natural Passion, and may be excited on various Occasions; but to mourn and grieve for Sin is a Strain above Nature, wrought in us by Grace, for having offended a Just and Holy God: Or else it is produced by the near Prospect of some dreadful Punishment that awaits us for it: The former is that Contrition of Heart which God will not despise; the latter is that Terror of Conscience which the School-Men call Attrition, an Affection regarding the Evil of Punishment only, and is far from that *godly Sorrow which worketh Repen-* 2 Cor. 7.
tance not to be repented of. A Man may be thus 10.
 afflicted, thus frighten'd, and full of Grief and Sorrow for some approaching Calamity, just ready to seize him, without any Quarrel at all with his darling Sins, or any Resolution to forsake them; without any Compunction of Soul, or Sense of his own Vileness, and Ingratitude, to a gracious God and Father, without any sincere and fix'd Vow of Amendment of Life for the Time to come. But Contrition of Heart is that Grace whereby a Man is truly humbled and mortified, and becomes Vile in his own Eyes at the Sight of his Transgressions, and is attended with Purposes to lead a new Life, and perform the whole Will of God for the future. It is something different from the Grace of Humility; for if Man had never sinned, he would nevertheless have been humble, as the Angels, who make no Account of, but cast
 them.

themselves down before the Throne, in token of Dependance, which is the true Spirit of Humility: But Contrition of Spirit presupposeth Sin, and in Holy Scripture is therefore called a Sacrifice: For I conceive, if there had been no Sin, there would have been no Sacrifice, at least of *broken and contrite Hearts*, the only living Sacrifice now acceptable with God.

Psal. 51.
17.

If then, our present Prayers and Fasting are accompanied with such Sacrifice, with such *godly Sorrow which worketh Repentance unto Amendment of Life*, and a fix'd and uniform Obedience to all God's Commandments, there is no doubt, but our merciful Father, who delighteth not in the Miseries of his Creatures, will *repent Him of the Evil He hath*, perhaps, *said He will do unto us*.

Jonah 3.
10.

The Arrows of Death are now gone abroad, they fly thick, and stick fast, in the Flesh of Multitudes round about us: No Age or Sex, no Strength can withstand them; the Desolation they make, simply considered, is dreadful, but the Departure, perhaps, of so many unprepared Souls, is above all Expression miserable. Now, if these Considerations will not awaken and rouse our sleepy Consciences, to a serious Prospect and Apprehension of our present Danger; if these amazing Plagues, and unspeakable Judgments upon our Neighbours, are not sufficient Warnings to us to repent, we are in a fair way to *perish likewise*. There is but one Thing left to produce it; I mean the Goodness of God, which hath hitherto spared and preserved us. I say this, if we have any ingenuous Disposition left, should lead us to Repentance and Reformation of Life. *For the Love of Christ*, saith the Apostle, *constraineth us*.

2 Cor. 5.
14.

But

But if neither His Judgments, nor His Mercy, can work upon us; if neither Terror nor Forbearance can persuade us, we have nothing to look for *but his fiery Indignation, and the destroying Angel:* For He will certainly visit for our Impenitence, and be avenged on such a stubborn and ungrateful People.

On the contrary, if we turn from our evil Ways by the Voice of His Mercy, or the Thundering of His Judgments, and do that *which is lawful and* Ezek. 18. *right,* then may we entertain comfortable Hopes, 27. that in this our *Day of Distress* God will hear our Psal. 18. 6. *Voice out of His Holy Temple, and that our Complaint shall come before him.* That He will deliver Psal. 90. 3. *us from the Pestilence that walketh in Darknes, and from the Sickness that destroyeth at Noon Day.* That ——— 6. *He will give His Angels Charge over us to keep us in* ——— 11. *all our Ways, that no Evil shall happen unto us, nor* ——— 10. *any Plague come nigh our Dwelling.*

I shall close all in the Words of Nehemiah.

Now therefore, our God, the Great, the Mighty, Neh. 9. 32. *and the Terrible God! Who keepest Covenant and Mercy: Let not all the Trouble seem little before Thee, that hath come upon us, on our Kings, on our Princes, and on our Priests, and on our Prophets, and on our Fathers, and on all Thy People!*

Howbeit, Thou art just in all that is brought upon ——— 33. *us, for Thou hast done right, but we have done wickedly!*

F I N I S.

But it cannot be denied, that the more
 can work according to the will of God, the more
 can we persuade us, we have nothing to look for
 but his free justification, and the glorious liberty
 For we will certainly visit his our inheritance
 and be engaged on his throne and angelical
 people.

On the contrary, if we turn from our evil ways
 by the voice of his mercy, or the thundering of
 his judgments, and do that which is lawful and just,
 right, then may we entertain comfortable hopes, as
 there is in our Day of Wrath, God will hear our prayer.
 There are of his Holy Trinity, and that our Com-
 fort shall be before him. Thus he will deliver his people
 as he has delivered them in the past, and
 from the Spirit's sanctification in New Day. Thus
 he will give his people Grace, even as to keep us in
 all our ways, that we shall have peace and
 any thing more than our Dilemma.

I shall close all in the Words of Nehemiah.

Thus saith the Lord, our God, the Great, the Mighty, the Holy,
 and the Lord God, who keeps Covenant and
 Mercy: for not all the people have kept his law,
 they have despised his word, and have despised
 his name, and have despised his word, and have
 despised his word, and have despised his word.

For what? To a man that is in the land of the living,
 as the Lord God, who keeps Covenant and
 Mercy.